

they are better armed with American guns, vehicles, and aircraft.

It is bitter because it was entirely preventable. It is bitter because those who work in national security know in their hearts that the President is wrong when he says the "war is over."

Mr. President, the war is not over. The war is over when your enemy accepts defeat. Our enemy, the Taliban, are not defeated; they are emboldened.

President Biden has handed them the greatest victory of their pitiful, pitiful history, a victory greater than they could have ever dreamed.

Using this victory as propaganda against the United States will be recruiting gold for the Taliban. Make no mistake, now that they have sent America running for the exits in Afghanistan, they intend to bring the terror we saw at Kabul's airport home to us right here in the United States of America.

We cannot allow that to happen because now, after our Commander in Chief decided to leave behind—let me repeat that—leave behind American taxpayer-funded equipment, the Taliban is one of the top 10 best equipped militaries in the world.

Over 44,000 military vehicles were left behind, nearly a half a million guns left behind, 33 Black Hawk helicopters left behind. All are now in the hands of our enemy. And we are fooling ourselves if we think they are not going to use this equipment against us.

Early last week, 10 of my colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee joined me in calling for hearings on the Biden administration's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan.

As members of the committee that overseas our Nation's Armed Forces, we bear a particular responsibility to seek—I mean seek—true and correct answers. We asked to hear from the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley; the commander of U.S. Central Command, General McKenzie; and the last commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, General Miller.

These are our top military leaders who need to be asked the hard questions, and that is what I and my colleagues intend to do, starting with why did we give up the most strategic air base in the middle of Asia, Bagram Airfield? Why did we do that? It makes no sense.

We owe it to our Nation, those who served, their families, and our allies to preserve the records of how our time in Afghanistan ended. For every people we and members of the Armed Services Committee represent here in Congress, this is the biggest issue facing our military since Vietnam. Those who have given so much to this cause are demoralized and disheartened. I have talked to hundreds of them in the last couple of weeks.

Al-Qaida didn't defeat our military. The Taliban didn't defeat our military. The complexities of rebuilding a country did not beat our military. This ad-

ministration in Washington, DC, defeated our troops.

Never in American history have we seen a Commander in Chief leave Americans behind enemy lines. It is unheard of, unheard of in the history of this country. I cannot think of a single fighting man or woman who would leave an American behind. It does not make sense. That is why they fight. That is why our military fight. We do not leave people behind. But they were ordered to leave by our Commander in Chief.

To those soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, guardsmen who served in Afghanistan, I promise you this: We will get answers from this administration.

If you are a member of the military or you have served our Nation and you have questions, I hope you will reach out to my office. I am ready to be your voice. I am ready to fight with you for your answers and accountability. I want to thank Chairman REED and Ranking Member INHOFE for scheduling hearings so that we can do just that in the next few weeks.

On September 11, America said: "Never forget." Thousands upon thousands of Americans have taken that rally cry to the enemy. To them I say: America has not forgotten. We will never forget. We will answer the fight, and we will fight for these answers.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HONORING LANCE CORPORAL RYLEE MCCOLLUM

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I come to the floor today to pay tribute to the life and service of LCpl Rylee McCollum. He was from Bondurant, WY.

On Thursday, August 26, the United States lost 13 men and women in uniform: 11 marines, an Army soldier, and a Navy corpsman. They were killed by a terrorist attack in Kabul, Afghanistan. At least 20 additional marines were wounded. It was the deadliest day for our Nation's military in more than a decade.

One of those fallen heroes was LCpl Rylee McCollum. He was just 20 years old. Rylee McCollum's life demonstrated the best of our Nation. His dad Jim told me that Rylee was full-blooded red, white, and blue—and from the very beginning.

Rylee's dad Jim wanted to serve in the military, but he couldn't because of a medical issue. Well, his son Rylee grew up with that same great desire to serve our Nation. Rylee's family said he wanted to be a marine from the very beginning. His sister Royce said that he ran around in his diapers and cowboy boots with his rifle.

He attended Jackson Hole High School. He graduated from Summit In-

novations High School in Wyoming. And he made a real name for himself all around the State as a champion wrestler.

Now, he had the kind of talents and abilities with which he could have done anything and everything. He wanted to serve America. He joined the Marines literally as soon as he could. He signed up on his 18th birthday. His plan was to serve in uniform and then come home to Wyoming. His goal was to teach history and coach wrestling.

On August 26, on his first deployment, he stood guard at the Hamid Karzai Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan. He protected the airport as Americans and our allies escaped to safety. His mission saved thousands of lives. While Rylee was protecting others, he was killed by a terrorist bomb.

Now, Rylee had just been married in February. His wife Gigi was expecting their first child, and he was excited to become a father. His child will never know Rylee. Yet his child will always know that Rylee McCollum, her father, was a hero.

On Friday, I stood side by side with Rylee's family and his pregnant wife Gigi at the airport in Jackson, WY, as Rylee's flag-draped casket was brought home for his very last trip to Wyoming. And today I got a text from Gigi with this magnificent picture. The text came within the last hour or so, and we were able to do a blowup of the text picture: Naval Hospital, Camp Pendleton, WY, welcomes baby girl Levi Rylee Rose, 8 pounds, 10 ounces, September 13—today—at 2 a.m. There is the baby, and there is the cutout of her father, Rylee McCollum.

Madam President, people in Wyoming and all across America have shown their love and respect and appreciation and admiration for Rylee and his family. People have already donated close to a million dollars to help Gigi and the baby. They donated these funds through a GoFundMe page on the internet, and it is a testament to the gratitude of the American people for the life and service of Rylee McCollum.

After Rylee's passing, a family friend in Jackson named Regi Stone told a story on Facebook. The story is about a conversation he once had with Rylee and with Regi's son Eli. Eli also serves in uniform. Regi says Eli and Rylee once said: If anything ever happened to us, just know we were doing what we loved.

What Rylee McCollum loved was protecting others. What Rylee McCollum loved was service. What Rylee McCollum loved was America.

And as Jim McCollum told me, he said: Rylee is standing guard tonight at the gates of Heaven.

Madam President, Rylee McCollum is an American hero. His name will always be held in honor throughout Wyoming. For the half-million people of our State, we all think of Rylee and Gigi and now the baby as part of our family.

May God comfort his family, and may God continue to bless this great

country for which Rylee McCollum gave his life.

AFGHANISTAN

Madam President, now I want to talk about the fall of Afghanistan. It is the thing that people in Wyoming want to talk about. They want to talk about Rylee, and they want to talk about what happened in Afghanistan.

Over the last 20 years, nearly 2,500 Americans gave their lives in Afghanistan. Our mission in Afghanistan was twofold: first, to kill the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11/2001, and, second, to take away the safe haven where terrorists planned attacks on America.

For the last 20 years, both missions were a success. Yet, in a matter of just weeks, everything changed, and they changed because of the complete incompetence of President Joe Biden. Because of that incompetence, the Taliban are stronger today than they were 20 years ago. They are stronger than ever. Afghanistan is now a safe haven for terrorists, and America is more at risk to terrorists today than it has been in two decades.

Afghanistan fell because President Biden paid exclusive attention to the calendar on the wall instead of the conditions on the ground. Joe Biden set an arbitrary political deadline of August 31.

The President wanted symbolism for September 11. Well, he got symbolism, but it wasn't what he wanted. It was the kind of symbolism that terrorists wanted.

Now, in April, when President Biden announced his deadline, I warned this would happen. I said, if we pulled out, the Taliban would take over. Leader MCCONNELL and other Senate Republicans came and warned the President as well. Some of the top generals in our military warned the President also. Yet President Biden stubbornly refused to listen. He refused to listen to his military and refused to listen to his national security advisers.

Our enemies knew we were leaving, and so they were on the offense. In a matter of weeks, Afghanistan fell to the Taliban. It was predictable, and it was preventable.

When Kabul fell, President Biden was on vacation. So were the Secretary of State and the White House Press Secretary. When British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tried to reach President Biden, he had to wait 36 hours. When the Canadian Prime Minister wanted to discuss Afghanistan, he couldn't get through to President Biden, but he got through to Hillary Clinton. The White House was asleep at the switch, and the White House switchboard was turned off to our closest allies.

Even after Kabul fell, President Biden stuck with his reckless and dangerous deadline, and as a result, President Biden has abandoned hundreds of Americans behind enemy lines. Many are still trapped there right now. I can't imagine any other President in the history of our country doing that, abandoning Americans behind enemy lines.

He also abandoned thousands of Afghan people who have helped us over the years. They helped our troops. That even includes an interpreter who helped save the President's life when he visited Afghanistan as a Senator. Many of these people are going to be killed by terrorists. President Biden signed their death warrants.

This is worse than Benghazi. This is worse than the Iranian hostage crisis. This is worse than the withdrawal from Vietnam. To me, this is America's worst national humiliation in more than 50 years. Simply stated, the fall of Afghanistan is a dereliction of duty—a dereliction of duty—by the Commander in Chief.

Joe Biden ran for President on two things. One, he raced on competence, and on foreign policy expertise. He has failed this entire Nation on both.

Nearly every prediction that President Biden made about Afghanistan has proven to be wrong.

On July 8, President Biden said there would be “no circumstance”—no circumstance—“where you [would] see people being lifted off the roof of the embassy of the United States from Afghanistan.” Just 5 weeks later, that is exactly the video of what the world saw.

President Biden claimed al-Qaida is gone from Afghanistan. Just hours later, the Pentagon had to admit that what the President said was not true. The President had lied to the American people. ISIS fighters are also in Afghanistan. They are the ones who killed the 13 servicemembers. Russians and Iranians are also in Afghanistan.

The President's hasty withdrawal left behind billions of dollars' worth of American weapons. Now it is all property of the terrorists. Joe Biden armed the terrorists beyond their wildest dreams. In total, the Taliban has seized more than 600,000 American weapons; 2,000 armored vehicles—humvees, American tanks; and 40 aircraft, including Black Hawk helicopters. Because of the incompetence of President Biden, the Taliban is now the best armed terrorist group in history. President Biden surrendered to the terrorists, and now the terrorists will be coming for us.

I join with my fellow Republicans in demanding a full accounting of American military equipment in Afghanistan. President Biden has absolutely no plan to either get the weapons back or to destroy them where they are. Instead, President Biden is making excuses. He claims he had to follow President Trump's withdrawal agreement. Well, that is not true, and we know it. President Trump's plan was conditioned on successful peace talks with the Afghan Government. Those talks are still unsuccessful.

President Biden has overturned dozens of policies from the previous administration. Let's look at a few of the Trump policies that President Biden reversed.

Well, he reversed the very successful “Remain in Mexico” policy, which has

resulted in a complete collapse of our border security. He tried to bring back the Iran deal. He put us back in the Paris accord. He rejoined the World Health Organization. So why didn't, then, President Biden either enforce the original withdrawal agreement from Afghanistan or renegotiate that agreement? He never even tried.

President Biden even chose to give up Bagram Air Force Base, north of Kabul. It is a strategic military location that military leaders will tell you should never have been abandoned under any circumstances. It is probably the only facility big enough to get every American out quickly. We left there in the middle of the night without even telling our allies on the ground. The U.S. Senate must investigate why the President ordered the military to abandon it.

The United States, I believe, has a sacred duty to finish the job of safely evacuating every American civilian in Afghanistan.

The President said on national television just a few weeks before the collapse that he would not leave Afghanistan and would not follow the directive that he had placed, the August 31 deadline, until every American was out. Yet, on August 30, he had every American servicemember out, and his own Secretary of State said there were still up to 200 American citizens trapped behind enemy lines. I believe we also have to evacuate the Afghans who risked their lives by providing us with assistance.

I believe the United States must never recognize the Taliban as a legitimate government. The Biden administration claimed they would not recognize any government which came to power by force in Afghanistan. I find it very hard to trust anything that President Biden says anymore.

Let me conclude with a word about our heroes who served our country in Afghanistan. Over my time in the Senate, I visited Afghanistan nine times. Each time I go, it is to say “thank you” to the men and women in uniform who are there. I visit with Wyoming National Guard. I visit with Wyoming regular military. Our National Guard, our Cowboy Cannoneers, have been deployed to Bagram Air Force Base, and I visited with them numerous times over a number of years. To them and to all Americans, I say, no matter how disgraceful this withdrawal, no matter how incompetent our Commander in Chief, no matter the failures of this administration, the truth remains: Our soldiers served with honor, they fought with valor, and they have kept us safe and free for the last 20 years. They are all heroes. We will always—always—hold them in high honor.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Mr. KING. Madam President, I have comments today about an extraordinary member of the Federal workforce, but before I do, I would like to